

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 329 104

FL 019 014

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TITLE Using Authentic Materials To Develop Functional Proficiency in Writing.  
PUB DATE Oct 89  
NOTE 17p.; In: Fryer, Bruce T., Ed.; Medley, Frank W., Jr., Ed. Perspectives and Horizons. Dimension: Languages 89. Report of Southern Conference on Language Teaching.  
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)  
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; Educational Strategies; German; \*Instructional Materials; \*Language Proficiency; Material Development; Realia; Second Language Instruction; Theories; \*Writing Instruction  
IDENTIFIERS \*Authentic Materials

## ABSTRACT

A theoretical framework for an integrated second language writing plan is proposed, and concrete suggestions and applications around which proficiency-based writing activities can be designed, developed, and implemented are offered. Writing is defined as a thinking process that needs to be introduced and practiced early in the language course. In a series of sample classroom activities, ways in which realia from the target culture can be adapted to the learner's immediate environment and everyday tasks are illustrated. In each, the intent is to teach the processes and principles of writing as a holistic construct within a larger discourse context (content level) with rules and conventions to be followed before teaching the individual discourse skills of writing (surface level). Examples are given in German. (MSE)

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# USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS TO DEVELOP FUNCTIONAL PROFICIENCY IN WRITING

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## INTRODUCTION

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Never before in the history of foreign language education has there been a better time to preach and teach the gospel of functional and authentic writing in an interdependent fashion that does not artificially separate it from the skills of speaking, listening, reading, and from culture. Indeed, writing for proficiency has sparked such a national interest in the teaching of writing across the curriculum that it continues to be the subject of much discussion in our profession today. This paper proposes to establish a theoretical framework for an integrated writing plan and offer concrete suggestions and applications around which proficiency-based writing activities can be designed, developed, and implemented.

## SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR A WRITING PLAN

As one reads the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (1985) for writing, it becomes clear that writing is not . . .

- \* the forgotten fourth skill.
- \* just taking pen in hand and putting it to paper.
- \* a "composition" class.
- \* compulsory muscle-flexing exercise of "writing things down."
- \* homework exercises, quizzes, boardwork, reports, or essays on "My Summer Vacation."
- \* practicing spelling, new verb forms, and vocabulary words.
- \* mere transcription of speech.

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- \* a passive skill or a by-product of other skills.
- \* a mass of red ink and a hard-to-explain grade.

Conversely, it is most definitively . . .

- \* a natural, self-directed and highly individual activity.
- \* a form of learning.
- \* a mental and physical activity.
- \* a rewarding risk-taking task.
- \* a problem-solving activity.
- \* a support skill for speaking, listening, and reading.
- \* a means of real communication, isolated in place and time.
- \* a slow and very often painful process to master.
- \* a discourse with specific rhetorical strategies, qualities, and conventions.
- \* a communication tool that not only reinforces other skills but also enhances the internalization of the target language and culture as well.
- \* a more accurate, complete, and less redundant skill than speech.
- \* a way of giving life to a once lifeless blank paper.

In summary, understanding that writing as a mode of expression is a support skill as well as a highly communicative act that accomplishes various expressive communicative purposes will help us structure, sequence, and choose activities that reflect the same natural and authentic purposes for which writing is actually used by the native speakers of the language within their own contexts. To meet this challenge, students and teachers of second or foreign languages must understand the reasons why we write in real life. Knowing why we write will help us identify, spiral, and progressively expand the functions needed to ascend from lower to higher levels of proficiency. This, in turn, enables us to inform, narrate, describe, persuade, question, promise, apologize, complain, express feelings and attitudes, preferences and concrete experiences, discuss ideas, and support points of view, and the like.

The ACTFL Guidelines for writing identify the multiple functions students are able to perform at each proficiency level, as well as the topics and situations in which they can carry out these functions, and the degree of accuracy with which students compose their thoughts coherently. Beyond that, this set of

guidelines also indicates that students at the lower levels of proficiency operate primarily with memorized material (learned words, phrases, lists, single syntactic frames, etc.) and show little evidence of creating with the language. Their level is one of a word-or sentence-level performance, whereas the advanced and superior students operate cohesively and coherently on the paragraph-length level, clearly create with language, and express themselves freely and lucidly.

To be compatible with a proficiency orientation, it becomes necessary to follow a spiral continuum or progression of writing exercises. Students should be provided with authentic writing tasks tailored to their current proficiency level. This is not to say that dictations, transcriptions, manipulative exercises, lists, guided and/or free compositions, and the like are no longer of service in our foreign language classrooms. It merely capitalizes upon the need to choose writing activities that reflect functional and authentic use of the language (Magnan, 1985).

What do we as teachers of second or foreign languages need to consider before we ask students to engage in any writing activity? First of all, for any activity to be oriented towards proficiency, three key concerns need to be addressed:

1. Are the writing activities authentic and keyed to the multiplicity of students' affective-cognitive needs, interests, abilities, ages, and styles of learning?
2. Do the writing activities we ask students to perform contribute to the development of communicative, and linguistic proficiency within a cultural context?
3. Will the group size affect students' language-use opportunities for purposeful functional and authentic interaction?

Only after having answered the above questions can we proceed to consider such issues as.

\* the teaching of the cognitive processes, including but not limited to, organization, elaboration, definition, generalization, argumentation, explanation, awareness of the audience, comparison and contrast, and the like.

\* the introduction of discourse features that reflect conventions of writing in the culture (e.g. connectors, spelling, qualifiers, punctuation, capitalization, abbreviations, clear and complete

information, elaboration and detail, organization, formalization of style and tone, accuracy, precise word, syntactic structures, and so on) to achieve a discourse beyond the paragraph level that is natural, cohesive and coherent.

\* the composing process of writing as a) planning, b) rescanning, and c) revising (see Krashen, 1984, pp. 17-18).

Beyond that, teachers at all levels need to be aware that writing assignments.

\* will become even more meaningful and purposeful, both for students and teachers alike, if they grow out of need.

\* should move from lists through descriptions and narration to hypothesizing and logical coherent paragraphs and discourse.

\* should be challenging, interesting, and practical in nature.

\* should increase in range and difficulty as students ascend from lower to higher levels of proficiency.

\* must go beyond linguistic manipulation to develop flexibility, creativity, and authenticity in the target language.

Because writing is a much different channel of delivery than speech and because writing does not develop as naturally as speech, it is obvious that the old saying "If you can say it, you can write it" is not valid. Writing requires clearer and more complete information, elaboration, better organization, and accuracy (Rivers, 1975). Students' control of grammatical/syntactical structures, instructional/communicative contents, and socio-cultural/interactional contexts need to be given primary consideration. Only then can they be expected to move from conceptual through partial to full performance control in writing at each proficiency level. Said another way, the audience for and the purpose of writing must be made clear to the students just as the topics need to be carefully sequenced so that they can first recognize the functions of writing, then manipulate them mechanically, and finally produce them on paper naturally for purposes of communication.

## PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICAL-MINDED

Because this paper is meant to be a practical one, some specific suggestions need to be presented first, before discussing the design, development and implementation of writing activities at various levels of proficiency:

1. Set the parameters of the writing activity. Asking students to write about what they did over the weekend is more demanding and confusing in nature than writing about how they spent their Saturday afternoon.
2. Select a topic appropriate to the linguistic level of the students. Don't expect them to narrate and describe if they cannot yet make or put together a grocery list.
3. From the very beginning of instruction teach the process of writing, i.e., the way the language operates in the target culture with respect to organizing, focusing, logical sequencing, style, and tone of discourse. Do not merely expose students to the conventions of the written code of the target language.
4. Have students write a series of drafts thus enabling them to receive adequate feedback (from peers or teachers) concerning content, organization of ideas, amount of detail, accuracy, etc. If possible, use anonymous writing samples from other classes to minimize the level of self-consciousness of the individual writer/ reader while maximizing the level of a cooperative, anxiety-free writing environment among students.
5. Have students engage in various authentic language-use writing activities that require some of them to list, others to narrate and describe, some to take notes, and others to summarize.
6. Provide students with as much authentic reader response as possible. Why? Because outside the four walls of the classroom, we always write for a reason, and there is always a real-life receiver, even oneself.
7. Go from global to specific and from the known to the unknown, similar to the process of listening and reading.
8. Provide a setting for the writing assignment for two reasons:  
a) it creates in the students' minds a schema that enables

them to assimilate and/or accommodate more efficiently the new knowledge/material to existing cognitive structures, and b) it makes the task even more meaningful and authentic in the eyes of the students.

### SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

The next step in organizing proficiency-based writing activities should be to devise, adapt, or select culturally authentic materials that reflect a proficiency orientation and combine them with writing tasks that are both entertaining and challenging. The professional literature on writing for proficiency suggests various ways for using authentic materials as cultural resources for enhancing students' receptive or productive skills (Rings, 1986; Weisenrieder, 1987; Rogers and Medley, 1988). Although realia from the target culture are of great benefit to language learners, it cannot be emphasized too strongly that it is not the content or form of the authentic materials that determine the difficulty of the materials, but the tasks we ask students to perform based on those authentic language samples.

The following activities, demonstrate how writing as a vital skill to effective communication can be introduced and practiced with the other skills in an interdependent fashion. Since skills do not develop in isolation nor apart from each other, so should they not be divorced from the context and cultural framework in which they are embedded.

"Ein Bild sagt mehr als tausend Worte":

[\*A picture is worth a thousand words\*]

Anlegen eines Familienalbums

[Building a family album]

|           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Purpose   | To combine the skills of listening and speaking with writing in a highly interesting and challenging authentic task that enables students to use descriptive and narrative language within past and present time frames |
| Content   | Family members and biographical information                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Functions | Asking for and supplying biographical information; identifying and labelling pictures; describing                                                                                                                       |

people, places and times; narrating events in paragraph form

#### Management

- A. Have students bring to class pictures of themselves with family and friends. Compile pictures into sets.
- B. Give each student a set of pictures other than their own.
- C. Have students interview the owners of the pictures while taking notes.
- D. Using their notes as an aid, have students transcribe the interview.
- E. Have students present the interview to the class.

Ich entwerfe mein eigne Autogrammkarte  
[I propose my own autobiographical sketch]

Purpose To move students from "Me Jane, You Tarzan" responses to extended discourse

Content Biographical and personal information

Functions Supplying personal biographical information on forms; writing resumes with some detail in past, present, and future time frames

#### Management

- A. Have students, either individually or as a group, read a number of Autogrammkarten [autobiographical sketches] of celebrities in order for them to become familiar with the vocabulary, format, style, and content.
- B. Supply students with an Autogrammkarte form and have them fill in the appropriate information. Also, students can fill in additional information which they may feel is lacking from the form such as occupation, nationality, hobbies, weight, personality, etc.

- C. As a preparation for Advanced-Level writing, have students write a short description of their "Werdegang," or in other words, a short biographical sketch up to the present.
- D. Next, having successfully completed the above step, have each student write a cover letter to the editor of a magazine explaining why the editor ought to publish the student's Autogrammkarte.

Sprich Dich aus . . .

[Speak out . . .]

|           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Purpose   | To give students a sense of accomplishment by practicing various functions of authentic-language use and by blending and synthesizing the mental-physical activity of writing with listening speaking, and reading tasks |
| Content   | Concrete topics relating to personal needs and interests                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Functions | Creating with the language; leaving messages on the answering machine; writing limited formal correspondence in paragraph form; explaining point of view with some detail; thanking and complaining                      |

#### Management

- A. Present the students with the following context:  
 "Something is troubling you, for example: you had a family fight, you are quarreling with your boyfriend/girlfriend, you were caught cheating, you need an operation, etc. While you were reading a magazine, you came across the feature "Sprich Dich aus . . ." You have a choice to either call or write.  
 When you call the line is busy. On your second call you get a recording.  
 1. Leave your name, the time of your call, a brief summary of the reason for your call, your

phone number, and what days and times you can be reached at home.

2. You have been waiting for the return call for a week now, and there is still no answer from the editor.

Your problem still exists, so you decide to write. Explain in detail what your problem is, the cause of your problem, how upset you are, and ask for advice.

3. You have received the editor's advice and followed it to the letter.

Now, write the editor, either

a) A thank-you note because things worked out so well, or

b) A note of complaint because the suggestions back-fired and made your problem even worse.

Mir liegt etwas auf dem Herzen  
[Something's on my mind]

- |            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Purpose    | To help students become more aware and critical of their own writing strategies and capabilities while engaging in a more complex simulated authentic task that requires the use of their expressive writing expertise such as organization, elaboration, argumentation, appropriate style and code, elements of cohesion and coherence in their discourse, and the like |
| Content    | Everyday events and preferences                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Functions  | Writing formal correspondence; explaining, suggesting, instructing, thanking, and comparing                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Management | <p>A. You watched a show on TV that included controversial issues which offended you. Write a letter to the network or the sponsors of the show stating that.</p> <p>1. you will no longer buy the products that sponsor such programs.</p>                                                                                                                              |

2. they should remove such offensive material from public TV.
  3. they should air such programs in a later time slot.
  4. if they do not stop broadcasting such programs, you will organize a letter-writing campaign to persuade Congress to establish a federal code for network broadcasting.
- B. You switch channels. For weeks now you have been watching quality shows. Write a letter to the network and inform them that.
1. they should continue airing such shows.
  2. they should include more of this quality programming.
  3. their shows exercise the First Amendment right of freedom of speech.
  4. their shows gave rise to a very stimulating and long-lasting discussion with your family/friends.
  5. most of their shows, although controversial in content, have been presented in an objective manner, treating both sides fairly.

Wie es uns gefällt?

[How it appeals to us]

|           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Purpose   | To accelerate the rate of change in the students' language attitude from one of "writeophobia" to functional and authentic writing that goes beyond the four walls of the classroom while generating their own motivation to learn by minimizing performance anxiety during learning |
| Content   | Clothing, colors, preferences, and concrete topics relating to personal interests                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Functions | Listing, identifying, and labelling clothing and pictures with descriptions and vice versa; writing short paragraphs about oneself; explaining and justifying personal selections                                                                                                    |

•••

## Management

- A. Review clothing vocabulary with students.
- B. Have students bring to class full-size pictures of themselves which they feel best express their personalities.
- C. Have students write a short paragraph explaining why these particular clothes best exemplify themselves.
- D. Collect all writings, mix, and line them up at random.  
Have students match one or more written descriptions with only one picture and justify orally their selections. At no time, however, should students reveal their own writings.

Traummadchen -- Madchentraum  
[Dream Girl -- Girl Dream]

- Purpose To make the reading of authentic texts fun and meaningful to students by asking them to engage in functions that are common in the target-language community
- Content Personal interests within the scope of very limited language experience
- Functions Supplying personal information; writing short descriptions; following directions as depicted from text; writing a short letter to the company that is promoting the contest

## Management

- A. Show on the overhead projector the text with only its heading, picture, and accompanying personal information. Cover the rest of the text and have students anticipate and/or predict based on the information available what the text is all about.
- B. If students have not yet guessed the word game Madchentraum-Traummadchen, have them skim and/or scan the entire text for global comprehension again.

- C. Based on their reading, have students write down in a numerical order all the directions they need to follow. For example:

I must

Ich muß . . .

1. . . . Fotomodell/Dressman werden.  
[become a model/mannequin]
2. . . . mich schminken  
[put on makeup]
3. . . . mich fotografieren(lassen)  
[have my picture taken]
4. . . . zwei Fotos (vor und nach der Verwandlung) und einen kurzen Text an die Redaktion schicken.  
[send two photos (before and after the transformation) and a short text to the editorial office]
5. Einssendenschluß ist . . .  
[the conclusion is . . .]
6. Die Anschrift ist . . .  
[the address is . . .]

(Higher-Level students should also include an accompanying letter to the company)

- D. Divide the class into two major groups. All females play Fotomodell [photomodel], all males Dressman [mannequin]. Give students a specific number of days to complete the assignment.
- E. Have students bring to the classroom the two pictures and present them to the rest of the class by sharing with the others their feelings after they became Traummadchen [Dream Girl] or Dressman [mannequin].
- F. Reward the best work and have it published in your school's newspaper.

#### Beyond the reading

- A. Divide the class into groups of five and give them a set of pictures to judge. They have to judge on personality, hair, style, clothes, color,

- and overall photogenic appearance.
- B. Each group selects a first, second, and third place picture. The representatives of each group meet in front of the whole class and decide on a final first, second, and third place picture among the top three selections of the individual groups.

## CONCLUSION

Although the writing activities presented here were generated for students of German, foreign language practitioners at the secondary or college level will see that they are easily adapted to other modern languages, including English as a second language. The author's experiences in utilizing these classroom-tested activities have consistently underlined their success in increasing, challenging, and stimulating students' creativity, intelligence, and keen writing interests.

This paper has attempted to address and define writing as a thinking process that needs to be introduced and practiced early in the language course. It has also shown how using realia from the target culture can be accessed and adapted to the learner's immediate environment and everyday tasks. Further, because writing is not only a support skill for speaking, listening, and reading but an advanced art as well, it is of great importance that we first teach the process and principles of writing as a holistic construct within a larger discourse context (content level) with rules and conventions to be followed before teaching the individual discourse skills of writing (surface level). Expressed differently, teaching the process and principles of expressive writing is more vital and realistic than spoonfeeding students a myriad of writing skills in isolation.

Whatever the individual approach, one should strive at all times to fill the gap between the surface and the content level and to provide students with ample opportunities to move from the word through the sentence to well-organized cohesive and coherent paragraph length discourse. Taking proficiency in writing for granted or just preaching the gospel of autonomous and expressive writing without ever getting around to teaching the process of it, all the while hoping that through some miracle proficient writers will emerge, is too simplistic. Furthermore, it is pedagogically unsound and cannot be acceptable in the decades

ahead. We simply must do better. As we look toward the writing needs of the '90s, new and refined writing activities that exemplify more closely natural and authentic communication should be gathered and implemented in language programs that are sensitive to the needs and interests of both students and teachers of foreign and second languages.

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